

The woman grew very sad, but made up her mind all the same one evening. She needed to see the Wise Man of Llanidloes, who knew a great many things and would know what to do.

She travelled far to see Llanidloes and explained to the Wise Man what had happened. The wise man thought for a moment. "Soon will arrive a harvest of oats and rye", he said. "At the time that you are preparing dinner for the reapers, remove the shell from one hen's egg and boil some potage in it. Then you must quietly take it to the door as if you were to give this to the reapers for dinner. You must listen to see if the twins speak. If you hear them speaking of things no child should know, you will understand that they are no children of mortals. Seize them and throw them without thought into the waters of Lake Elvyn. But if you don't hear anything strange, do not harm them."



So the woman waited patiently until the day of the harvest. On that day the woman remembered the wise man's words. She placed the eggshell on the fire, removed it and took it to the door. She waited, listening nervously. Then one child said to the other:



"Acorn before oak I knew, an egg before a hen but I never heard of an eggshell brew a dinner for harvest men." It was a rhyme of wisdom, impossible for a baby to know.

She returned to the house at once, took the children from their cradles and flung them into the Llyn. Then the fairies flew out to save their babies. When the couple returned home the human babies were back in their cradles and the couple rejoiced the return of their own.



(a) How did the woman know that something was wrong?

1. The babies did not grow.

2. The babies spoke a rhyme that no baby would be able to speak or know.

(b) Why do you think the man blamed his wife?

The wife left the babies alone in the house.

(c) In your opinion which type of fairy swapped the babies? Give a reason for your answer? *Study the clues on the next page to help answer this question!

Changelings. Changelings can swap their own kind for human babies to cause mischief for humans. They take on the form of the human babies, so can be mistaken.

Dullahan

It appears as a headless horseman clothed all in black. The wild horse it rides breathes fire and it makes the sound of thunder as it gallops by. If this fairy stands still there will most certainly be a death in that area. It also said to call out the name of the person who is about to die.

Grogoch

It looks like a small ancient man, with a coat of thick reddish fur and wearing only twigs and dirt. These fairies are mostly invisible to people, but will show themselves to a person who has gained their trust. If the fairy takes a shine to you, it may follow you home to help with housework and other jobs such as, planting and harvesting. As a reward, it will expect a jug of fresh cream.

Changeling

This baby fairy is taken into a human household in the place of the original human child. It takes on the appearance of a baby with the wrinkled, crooked features of an old person. These fairies are ill-tempered and will often amuse themselves by using dark magic in the household, spreading bad luck upon the adopted family. They enjoy playing the Irish pipes or the flute with incredible skill.

I've heard that there are seven types of Irish fairy!

**Pooka**

This is Ireland's most feared fairy, a shape shifter with a number of terrible forms. It's usually seen as a smooth dark horse with burning eyes and a tattered mane. It is very destructive and likes to ruin crops, terrorise farm animals and kidnap people travelling late at night, dropping them into bog holes. It has even learned human speech and sometimes will call the names of people it wants to take out on its nightly hunts.

Leprechaun

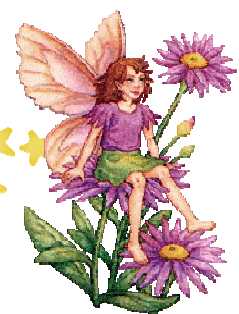
This fairy comes in the form of a tiny old man who has drunk too much. It likes to steal or borrow from humans and enjoys causing mischief in the home. It guards its treasure fiercely, storing it in crocks or pots. If captured the fairy will offer gold for their freedom but once it has gone, the gold will disappear.

Banshee

This fairy is a symbol of death. She takes on two main forms; a noble nurse and a withered old hag, with grey hooded cloak and robes. She is heard more often than seen. Her cry is one of mourning and can be heard warning of the death of a family member in the near future, however she can only foresee deaths in old Irish families.

Merrow

These beautiful female fairies live in the ocean. Their legs are human-like but their feet are flatter and webbed. They are known to wear seal skins and caps made from feather that helps them swim and breathe underwater. If the fairy wishes to set foot on land, she must leave her clothing behind. If these clothes are found by a human, they have complete control over the fairy. Men have been known to take these fairies as wives and have children with them but if the fairy finds her clothing she will abandon her family at once and return to the sea.





Activity

Can you tell the fairies apart? Match the image to the correct name. See the descriptions above for help!

1=**Dullahan.**

2=**Banshee.**

3=**Merrow.**

4=**Grogoch.**

5=**Leprechaun.**

6=**Pooka.**

7=**Changeling.**

1



2



3



4



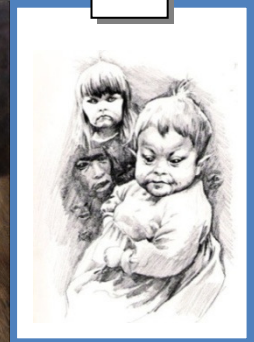
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6



7



Throughout the butter-making process, many rituals were practised to make sure the fairies didn't meddle with the butter or the cows, as the source of the butter. These rituals were meant to please the fairies or better still, keep them away. A mixture of **Pagan** and Christian prayers were usually spoken aloud throughout the butter making process, especially during the **churning**, as this was thought to be the trickiest part.

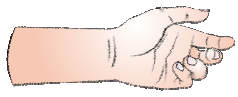


The cows needed protection above all else. The quality of the butter depended on the health of the cow. Saint Brigit crosses were hung above the cow house to protect the cows. Prayers were said to ensure they stayed healthy and holy water was thrown over them to prevent any illness developing.

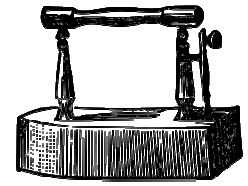


Did you know that Piseogs came from local Irish superstitions? Nowadays Piseogs are strongest in the West of Ireland.

There were even stranger rituals used still. People believed that certain actions would guarantee good butter. One method included spreading unsalted butter on the wall of the butter-making room to keep the fairies away. During the churning process special precautions were made. People believed that sprinkling salt over the lid of the churn, or placing a red-hot **iron** beneath the churn would



bring good luck. Iron was thought to protect against the fairies and any tricks they might play. The



strangest and most gruesome ritual of all was using the hand of a recently executed dead man to stir the milk in the **butter churn!**

Imagine living by those superstitions every day. Some rituals were not only difficult but plain silly! What's more, there was no proof that these rituals gave people good luck, or prevented bad luck. However, in those times people did them without questioning. People grew up hearing fables about bad luck befalling people and therefore were afraid of the same happening to them. They couldn't risk not carrying out even one ritual in case bad luck followed.



Activities

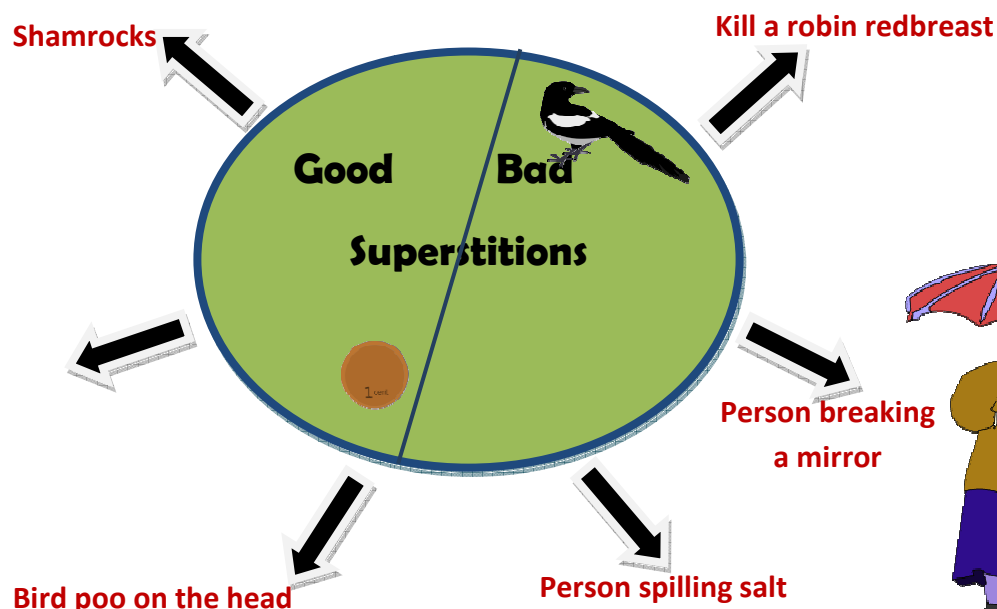


Superstitions usually involve one or more of the following: animals, plants, objects, a certain situation or action and usually a person. They bring either good luck or bad luck.

(a) Name a few superstitions that involve either good luck or bad luck. Try to name at least one superstition of each of the following: an animal, plant, object, or person making an action or in a situation.

(b) Can you remember a superstitious date?

Friday the 13th



Superstitious Penny Rhyme:

Find a penny, pick it up. All day long, you'll have good luck!

*Can you think of any more superstitious rhymes?

One for sorrow
Two for joy
Three for a girl
Four for a boy
Five for silver
Six for gold
Seven for a secret never to be told!



What have I learned?

Record four new facts that you didn't know before!



Fact 1:

A light blue tray containing three yellow rectangular blocks of varying sizes and orientations. To the right of the blocks is a large yellow rectangular box for writing facts.

Fact 2:

A light blue tray containing three yellow rectangular blocks of varying sizes and orientations. To the right of the blocks is a large yellow rectangular box for writing facts.

Fact 3:

A light blue tray containing three yellow rectangular blocks of varying sizes and orientations. To the right of the blocks is a large yellow rectangular box for writing facts.

Fact 4:

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